

FirstNet devotes half is budget to RFP development

Urgent Communications By Jill Nolin

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[FirstNet](#) just put its money where its priorities are.

The agency's finance committee today allocated \$42.5 million and \$22.3 million, respectively, toward completing its two primary goals for 2015: developing the comprehensive request for proposals (RFP) that identify partners for the public-safety broadband network and conducting state consultations and outreach.

FirstNet staff presented the more detailed spending plan for the 2015 fiscal year during a special meeting of the board's finance committee.

The committee voted to allow FirstNet to spend \$86.2 million during fiscal year 2015, which—in addition to funding for the RFP and consultations—includes \$21.4 million for other expenses like IT infrastructure improvements and interagency service agreements. The total budget amount is more than 28% less than the \$120 million in spending authority that the FirstNet board approved for the organization during its September meeting.

Almost half of the agency's funding will be devoted to the development of the long-awaited RFP, which has 20 incremental deliverables, according to FirstNet Acting General Manager TJ Kennedy. The funds will be used for reviewing applicable state and territory laws and regulations, continuing to support the [Public Safety Communications Research](#) (PSCR) program, and hiring in-house personnel to manage and oversee the RFP process.

“As part of (the RFP) process, there's a lot of work that goes on to have these deliverables written, reviewed, tested and peer reviewed and then actually become final as part of that acquisition package,” Kennedy said during the meeting, which was conducted via a public teleconference.

“A lot of the staffing that we have going forward in the fiscal year ‘15 budget is really to make sure that we complete those in good detail, with excellent review and make sure that we turn out a very good product that results in a good set of proposals coming back to FirstNet.”

Ellen Herbst, chief financial officer and assistant secretary of administration with the U.S. Department of Commerce, told the committee that her office reviewed the budget and found it “to be reasonable for the activities and milestones that the FirstNet is proposing to accomplish in ‘15.”

Kennedy said FirstNet has struggled to grow within the rigid confines of the federal hiring process, but he added that the administration has achieved a “repeatable capability” that has enabled them to predict timeframes better and more successfully secure the right resources.

“That does not mean it will not still be a struggle to get the kind of technical talent and management resources we need,” Kennedy said. “We’re bringing people into a startup-like environment inside a government, putting some very high demands on them for performance. It is a very difficult thing to do within the government infrastructure, but we feel like we’re seeing improvements in that and certainly our predictability is improving.”

The finance committee granted the FirstNet administrators the flexibility to make slight adjustments to the funding levels approved Monday. The leadership has the authority to reallocate up to 10% from one major category to another without coming back for approval. They also are permitted to exceed the approved funding by 10% collectively or by 15% within any of the categories.

A final report on the 2014 fiscal year should be ready for the board’s December meeting, staff said. At the same meeting, the agency will give a more detailed update on what additional steps will be needed before a draft RFP can be published, Kennedy said. That draft RFP is expected to be released publicly next year.

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